

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, CA
SUBJECT: LEVESQUE REAFFIRMS "UNSHAKEABLE" COMMITMENT TO
SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION

1. PRIME MINISTER LEVESQUE EMERGED FROM A THREE-DAY MEETING WITH HIS CABINET IN MONTEBELLO, QUEBEC OVER THE WEEKEND TO ANNOUNCE THAT HIS GOVERNMENT REMAINED "FIRMLY AND UNSHAKEABLY" COMMITTED TO THE PRINCIPLES OF SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION WHICH THE PQ HAS ESPOUSED "SINCE ITS INCEPTION," PRINCIPLES CALLING FOR "A POLITICALLY SOVEREIGN QUEBEC IN ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION WITH THE REST OF CANADA." LEVESQUE SAID THAT THE CABINET HAD REACHED AN AGREEMENT ON THE "MAJOR ELEMENTS" OF THE SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION PLAN, BUT THAT THE PLAN WOULD NOT BE MADE PUBLIC UNTIL AFTER THE FEDERAL ELECTIONS. TWO OF THE "MAJOR ELEMENTS" UPON WHICH AGREEMENT HAD BEEN REACHED, LEVESQUE INSISTED, WERE THE ISSUES OF MONETARY UNION AND THE POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS WHICH WOULD ADMINISTER THE "ASSOCIATION" BETWEEN A SOVEREIGN QUEBEC AND CANADA. LEVESQUE REFUSED TO DISCUSS FURTHER THE SUBSTANCE OF THE AGREEMENT, SAYING THAT HE HAD NO INTENTION OF ALLOWING THE ISSUE TO BECOME A POLITICAL FOOTBALL IN THE FEDERAL ELECTIONS.

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2. BEFORE THE MONTEBELLO MEETING THE QUEBEC PRESS HAD BEEN IN A FEVER OF SPECULATION REGARDING A POSSIBLE NEW POLITICAL ORIENTATION BY THE GOQ. THE SPECULATION WAS FUELED BY THE GOVERNMENT'S COOPERATIVE STANCE WITH THE PROVINCIAL PREMIERS AT REGINA RECENTLY (QUEBEC 0275) AND BY A HINT BY CLAUDE MORIN THAT THE GOQ WOULD CONSIDER A POSSIBLE "CENTRAL PARLIAMENT," MODELED ON THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, CONSISTING OF REPRESENTATIVES OF BOTH

CANADA AND A SOVEREIGN QUEBEC. MORIN'S ALLEGED PROPOSAL GAVE RISE TO A NUMBER OF STORIES SUGGESTING THAT THE GOQ WAS PLANNING A MAJOR NEW ORIENTATION OF ITS SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION PLAN. JOURNAL DE QUEBEC POLITICAL COLUMNIST NORMAND GIRARD WENT SO FAR AS TO SAY THAT PQ LEADERS WERE NO LONGER INTERESTED IN SEPARATION BUT ONLY IN RETAINING POLITICAL POWER IN QUEBEC, AND SUGGESTED THAT THE POSSIBILITY OF A SPLIT IN THE PQ, COMPLETE WITH THE RESIGNATION OF SEVERAL MINISTERS, WAS IN THE WIND. MEANWHILE LE DEVOIR EDITORIALIST LISE BISSONETTE, NOTING THE "SOFT" VIEW OF SEPARATISM BEING PEDDLED IN RECENT MONTHS BY LEVESQUE AND MORIN, WONDERED WHETHER THE "MOMENT MIGHT COME VERY SOON WHEN THE LINE OF DEMARCATION BETWEEN RENEWED FEDERALISM AND SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION WOULD BECOME SO OBSCURE THAT QUEBEC COULD DO AWAY WITH ITS FASCINATING BUT DIVISIVE AND UNDOUBTEDLY RISKY REFERENDUM," AND MUSED ABOUT THE "UNTHINKABLE" POSSIBILITY OF A COMMON FRONT AGAINST OTTAWA BY THE PQ AND THE PROVINCIAL LIBERALS UNDER RYAN.

3. LEVESQUE'S STATEMENT AT MONTEBELLO WAS CLEARLY DESIGNED TO QUASH SUCH SPECULATION AND TO CALM ANY FEARS AMONG THE PARTY'S MILITANTS. THE PREMIER WAS QUICK TO CRITICIZE THE PRESS FOR OVERDRAMATIZING A NON-STORY. (LA PRESSE IN FACT REPORTED YESTERDAY THAT MORIN HAD MADE HIS "CENTRAL PARLIAMENT" REMARK SEVERAL WEEKS AGO DURING A LECTURE TO STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SHERBROOKE, AN "ACADEMIC DISCUSSION" DURING WHICH HE TOUCHED ON VARIOUS HYPOTHETICAL FORMS OF SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ALLEGEDLY ONE MEMBER OF MORIN'S AUDIENCE WAS A REPORTER FROM HALIFAX, WHO RAN THE "CENTRAL PARLIAMENT" STORY IN THE HALIFAX CHRONICLE-HERALD SOME TIME LATER, WHENCE IT WAS PICKED UP BY THE QUEBEC PRESS. ACCORDING TO THIS ACCOUNT, WHEN MORIN WAS FACED WITH THE STORY, HE TERMED IT RIDICULOUS, NOT REALIZING THAT HE HIMSELF WAS THE SOURCE.) AS A RESULT LOCAL COMMENTATORS SUBSIDED IN DISAPPOINTMENT, CONFINING THEMSELVES TO CALLING EDITORIALY FOR AN "END TO SUSPENSE" ABOUT THE SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION PROPOSALS. (GIRARD GRUMBLED THAT THE PQ'S "OPEN GOVERNMENT" WAS "AS TRANSPARENT AS AN ICEBERG").

4. COMMENT: WE HAVE REPORTED REGULARLY ON THE TENSIONS WITHIN THE PQ CABINET AND PARTY OVER REFERENDUM STRATEGY (SEE, MOST RECENTLY, QUEBEC 0288). WHILE THE LOCAL PRESS ALMOST CERTAINLY OVERPLAYED ITS PRE-MONTEBELLO BUILDUP, THE FACT REMAINS THAT PROFOUND DIFFERENCES AS TO STRATEGY AND, PERHAPS, AS TO ULTIMATE OBJECTIVE EXIST WITHIN THE HIGHEST COUNCILS OF THE PQ. DESPITE LEVESQUE'S STRONG STATEMENT, WE ARE INCLINED TO BELIEVE THAT THESE TENSIONS HAVE NOT BEEN RESOLVED AND ARE LIKELY TO MANIFEST THEMSELVES AGAIN IN THE NEAR FUTURE, NOTABLY AT THE NEXT MEETING OF THE PQ NATIONAL COUNCIL, SCHEDULED FOR LATE SEPTEMBER AT ROUNNORANDA. SECURITY AT MONTEBELLO WAS EXTREMELY TIGHT--CLAUDE MORIN

REPORTEDLY SCRAPPED HIS WRITTEN PRESENTATION AND CONFINED HIMSELF
TO AN ORAL BRIEFING FOR FEAR OF LEAKS--AND LITTLE OF THE SUBSTANCE
OF THE DISCUSSIONS HAS SURFACED AS YET. NEVERTHELESS THE GOQ IS
SUBSTANTIALLY MORE TRANSPARENT THAN AN ICEBERG AND WE EXPECT THAT
WE WILL LEARN MORE OF WHAT TRANSPIRED IN COMING DAYS.
MCNAMARA

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